

NEWS FROM ED MARKEY

United States Congress

Massachusetts Seventh District

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REP. MARKEY CALLS FOR FULL FUNDING FOR LOCAL FIRST RESPONDER PROGRAM

DHS may decimate dirty bomb defenses in Mass. Cities and Other Population Centers

WASHINGTON, DC - Representative Edward Markey (D-MA), a senior member of the Select Committee on Homeland Security, today released a letter to Tom Ridge, Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security, urging him to propose full funding in the FY 2005 budget for the Metropolitan Medical Response System (MMRS), an important component of domestic preparedness for terrorist dirty bomb attacks.

“The threat of dirty bombs is very real,” Rep. Markey said. “We know that al Qaeda is seeking materials for a dirty bomb, and we know that detonation of a dirty bomb could cause tremendous damage, to our public health, to the economy and to our homeland security. The Metropolitan Medical Response System program helps local first responders better prepare for radiological and other terrorist attacks. However, the Bush Administration reportedly is considering cutting 80% of its funding for FY 2005. Secretary Ridge should send Congress a budget that includes full funding for Metropolitan Medical Response System.”

The MMRS program began in the aftermath of the terrorist release of nerve gas in a Tokyo subway in 1995. The program now provides funds to more than 100 U.S. cities including Boston, Atlanta, Washington DC, New York, Philadelphia, Arlington MA, Springfield MA, and Worcester MA, to improve the ability of local first responder units to deal with chemical, biological and radiological terrorist attacks. As a condition of the funding, the city governments must provide the Department of Homeland Security with detailed terrorism response plans. The Institute of Medicine released a study of MMRS in 2002, finding that “the committee has been favorably impressed by [MMRS]’s focus on empowering local communities, as opposed to creating yet another federal team to rush to the community at the time of an incident.” MMRS was funded at \$50 million in FY 2003 and FY 2004, although the President’s budget request in FY 2004 did not include any money for the program.

Rep. Markey recently introduced H.R. 891, the Dirty Bomb Prevention Act, which would improve controls on radiological materials. There is now no national plan to track or recover radioactive sources, thousands of which are used in research, medicine and industry. The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has admitted that of the 1700 radioactive sources that have been lost or stolen since 1998, more than half are still missing.

Rep. Markey concluded, “At a time when American cities face a serious threat from dirty bombs, we need to enhance the ability of local first responder teams to deal with situations in the 24 to 48 hours it takes for outside help to arrive. The Dirty Bomb Prevention Act will help reduce the threat of dirty bombs, and the MMRS program is a vital complement to efforts to control radiological materials. The Bush Administration should propose full funding – at or above the FY 2004 level – for this important program.”

Additional information is available at Rep. Markey’s website, <http://www.house.gov/markey>.

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